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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003756

SIPDIS

NSC FOR WILDER AND PHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: ANTI-GOVERNMENT UDD RESORTS TO PAD METHODS TO
BLOCK THAI PARLIAMENT, PREVENT PM POLICY ADDRESS

REF: BANGKOK 3032

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary. In moves evocative of protests in recent months by yellow-shirted People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protesters, approximately 5,000 anti-government, red-shirted United Front for Democracy (UDD) protesters blocked the entrances to Thailand's Parliament December 29. The protesters' siege prevented Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva from delivering a constitutionally-mandated policy address to a joint session of the House and the Senate to launch his government's term in office. House Speaker Chai Chidchob provisionally postponed the policy address until the evening of December 29, but Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban indicated publicly that the policy address may have to postponed until early January, amidst vows by UDD leaders that their protests would continue until PM Abhisit stepped down and called for new elections. The Army also publicly expressed concern that the ongoing political conflict could affect New Year's celebrations.

¶2. (C) Comment. The UDD tactics to obstruct the government from conducting business are directly adopted from the aggressive PAD protests from August - December. By blocking the Parliament, the UDD has shown that it is just as willing as the PAD was to disrupt the government. Abhisit's commitment to steer clear of the use of force may be prudent to avoid the perception that security forces might be more willing to employ the use of force to clear UDD supporters than they had been to control PAD protests, but the decision carries the risk that Abhisit could end up as hamstrung as his hapless predecessor Somchai was. The use of protests to shut down the normal operations of government highlights the difficulties of the Thai democratic system and traditional Thai indirect cultural norms in resolving political differences and aggressive tactics via pragmatic means. Rumors of pro-Thaksin elements planning violence during the New Year holiday are particularly worrying. We have issued a security notice cautioning Mission employees and American citizens to exercise caution. End Summary and Comment.

RED SHIRTS LAY SIEGE TO PARLIAMENT

¶3. (U) Thousands of anti-government, pro-Thaksin, UDD

protesters blocked the Parliament from convening a joint session of the House and Senate the morning of December 29. The planned session was to have heard Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's inaugural policy address, but by late December 29 the protesters had refused to disperse from Parliament, and it was unclear when (or where) the session might convene. The Thai Constitution requires the government to present a policy statement within fifteen days of taking office and before the government is allowed to begin to conduct official business. Jakrapob Penkair, a leader of the UDD and a minister during the Samak Sundaravej government earlier this year, said publicly that the protests would continue for three days or until Abhisit met directly with the protesters. At least one Puea Thai member of Parliament, Surathin Pimanmekin of Udon Thani, joined the redshirt rally by giving a speech to the UDD protesters.

¶4. (U) After House Speaker Chai Chidchob initially postponed the policy speech from 0930 to 1400, ruling party officials tried to negotiate with the protest leaders in the interim, but were unable to come to an agreement that would end the protest. Chai later announced that the government would try to present the policy address at 1700 December 29, but that if the protest continued to block access to Parliament, the government would attempt to give the address again December ¶30. Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban, responsible for security affairs for the Abhisit government and the deal-maker who cobbled together the coalition, appeared to be leading negotiations efforts and indicated publicly that the policy address may have to be postponed until early January.

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¶5. (U) The UDD siege of Parliament came one day after supporters gathered at Sanam Luang, a park Parliament in central Bangkok. The Bangkok Post estimated the size of the gathering at close to 20,000. A group of the UDD protesters surrounded the entrances to Parliament around midnight December 28, and more protesters joined them early December ¶29.

PM COMMITS TO MAINTAINING LAW AND ORDER WITHOUT VIOLENCE

¶6. (U) PM Abhisit said publicly December 28 that authorities would maintain law and order so that New Year's celebrations would proceed without disruption. He also promised not to use force to remove the UDD protesters. Deputy Metropolitan Police Chief Major General Pongsan Jiemon was quoted in the December 29 edition of The Nation as saying that police would not attempt to block the protesters and that the police did not want a repeat of the October 7 violent clashes which accompanied former PM Somchai's inaugural policy address (reftel). That incident left two dead and hundreds injured after clashes erupted when Thai police carried out street clearing operations to disperse PAD demonstrators from Parliament.

¶7. (C) Royal Thai Army spokesperson Colonel Sansern Kaewkamnerd said publicly December 29 that the Army would continue with the same approach it had taken during the PAD protests. During previous protests, the military insisted that the police should take the lead in maintaining law and order. Military leaders said both publicly and privately that they would support the police, but only if directed to do so by the government.

WORRIES ABOUT A POTENTIAL REPEAT OF NY EVE BOMBINGS?

¶8. (C) Sansern told The Nation that Army Commander General Anupong Paochinda was concerned that the protests could have an impact during New Year holiday celebration. Sansern's quote echoed a December 22 comment General Anupong made to the Ambassador in which Anupong expressed worry about a potential repeat of the still unsolved December 31, 2006

bombings in Bangkok. Anupong told the Ambassador that he was not planning any activities for the New Year holiday because he expected that the "red shirts" would hire criminal elements to carry out a bombing or bombings during the holiday. Separately, former Tourism Minister Weerasak Kowsurat, affiliated with the Chat Thai party (a member of both the former and current coalitions) similarly told us December 19 that he would not be surprised if pro-Thaksin elements were planning a bombing. Although we have no specific information, we have issued a Mission security notice and a warden message urging caution on New Year's Eve.

JOHN